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ABSTRACT

The idea that rhetoric might operate in epistemologically significant ways was first presented by Plato. This paper argues that the heart of Plato's conception of epistemic discourse is a recognition of the centrality of intrapersonal rhetoric. Through a careful study of Platonic writing, particularly the "Phaedrus," three principal elements of rhetorical theory are identified: rhetoric encompasses any form of address, spoken or written, on any subject; rhetoric is a separate discipline with its own subject matter, methods, and principles; and rhetoric can function only to the degree that it influences the soul. After discussing the "rhetoric is epistemic" doctrine of contemporary theorists, the paper draws on Plato's epistemology, based on his explicit statement that "the function of oratory is in fact to influence men's souls," and articulates the differences between the two points of view. The paper proposes a concept of rhetorical dialectic that avoids an "either/or" position and offers a unique way of explaining the generation of knowledge. Ten pages of end notes accompany the paper. (MAI)

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# DISCOURSE, DIALECTIC AND INTRAPERSONAL RHETORIC: A REINTERPRETATION OF PLATO'S RHETORICAL THEORY

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# DISCOURSE, DIALECTIC AND INTRAPERSONAL RHETORIC: A REINTERPRETATION OF PLATO'S RHETORICAL THEORY

Among the many examples of contemporary scholarship which reflect what Douglas Ehninger has called "the unity of rhetoric and philosophy"[1] are a number of studies which view discourse as epistemologically significant. Robert Scott, for example, has argued that speech communication itself may be regarded as a means of generating knowledge.[2] Scott's essay has been the progenitor of numerous monographs whose authors clarify, expand, or otherwise concern themselves with his claim that "rhetoric must be perceived as a way of knowing . . . it is epistemic."[3]

In one such essay I have sought to establish that reflection or internal dialogue with oneself may be as important in attaining knowledge as is the interpersonal speech act and that intrapersonal discourse may even constitute "the paradigm of epistemic rhetoric."[4] Curiously, however--and despite the fact that questions of epistemology

are essentially philosophic in nature--scant attention has been paid to the philosophical assumptions in which a rhetorical epistemology may be grounded--assumptions which could serve to elucidate the concept of rhetorical knowlege.[5] Furthermore, there appears to be little inclination on the part of scholars in our field to survey the literature of the history of philosophy in search of any such heritage.

In what follows I will identify what I take to be the philosophical tradition in which a particular view of rhetoric as epistemic is most securely anchored. As will become evident, both the doctrine upon which this writer bases the epistemic claim, as well as what that claim entails, depart significantly from Scott's original formulation. This contrast will be discussed later.

Baldly stated, this study contends that the notion of "rhetoric as a way of knowing" was suggested over two millenia ago by Plato. Moreover, I will argue that at the heart of Plato's conception of epistemic discourse was a recognition of the centrality of intrapersonal rhetoric. Finally, I will assess the implications of this analysis for contemporary rhetorical theory, especially insofar as it departs from Scott's original position.

## PLATO'S THEORY OF RHETORIC: THE CONTROVERSY

Much, though not all, of what Plato has to say concerning rhetoric is voiced in the Gorgias and the Phaedrus, two dialogues whose interpretation has been the source of considerable controversy. Disagreement among scholars stems from the fact that the two dialogues reach divergent conclusions. In the Gorgias, Plato is severely critical of rhetoric as Socrates urges Callicles to lead a life dedicated not to his profession of rhetoric, but to the pursuit of virtue: "Let us follow it, then, and urge on everyone else to do the same and to abandon that way in which you put your confidence and your exhortations; for your way, Callicles, has no value whatever" (527e). By contrast, in the Phaedrus there is no dogmatic condemnation of rhetoric. Rather, Plato advances his own conception of what a true art (τέχνη) of rhetoric must embody, namely, a "scientific" methodology (270e).[6]

Still another piece of evidence supporting the contention that Plato, in the Phaedrus, was sympathetic to a revised, more rigorous, rhetorical τέχνη is his praise of the rhetorician Isocrates:

> It seems to me that his natural powers give him a superiority over anything that Lysias has achieved in literature, and also that in point of character he is of a nobler composition; hence it would not surprise me if with advancing

> years he made all his literary predecessors look like very small fry; that is, supposing him to persist in the actual type of writing in which he engages at present; still more so, if he should become dissatisfied with such work, and a sublimer impulse lead him to do greater things. For that mind of his, Phaedrus, contains an innate tincture of philosophy (279a).[7]

Given this basic inconsistency between the Gorgias, where rhetoric is rejected virtually wholesale, and the Phaedrus, where Plato suggests the possibility of a philosophically respectable rhetorical art, the question remains, What is to account for the discrepancy?[8]

The most reasonable explanation has been offered by Edwin Black.[9] He suggests that in the Gorgias Plato is not launching an attack against all rhetoric, but rather against the particular brand of rhetoric taught by Gorgias and his fellow sophists: "All we have a right to infer from the text of the Gorgias is that Plato opposed only a particular view of rhetoric unsuccessfully defended in the dialogue by Gorgias, Polus, and Callicles, and probably actually defended by leading Sophists and rhetoricians of Plato's time."[10]

Black's thesis is confirmed by a more recent study of the Gorgias undertaken by Richard Enos.[11] Enos suggests that Plato's attack against rhetoric is the result of a

disparity in the epistemology of both thinkers: "His [Gorgias'] methodology was based upon a system of investigation in which probable knowledge or opinion was revealed as a synthesis from dichotomous antithetical positions. . . . He opposed Plato's views on a morally ideal rhetoric because Gorgias denied the existence of essences and consequently believed that whatever limited speculation man could advance toward such notions could only be absurd, incomplete, and irrelevant to pragmatic concerns."[12] Certainly, Enos' monograph goes a long way in accounting for Plato's indictment of Rhetoric in the Gorgias; it is an indictment of Gorgian rhetoric and its attendant epistemological assumptions, and not an indictment of all rhetoric. Furthermore, Enos buttresses Black's contention that "the Phaedrus is the constructive complement of the Gorgias"[13] and that "the two dialogues taken together constitute a consistent view of rhetoric."[14]

Still additional support for Black's view is found in an investigation conducted by Rollin Quimby.[15] Quimby surveys a number of Plato's writings, including the two dialogues in question, and concludes that in the Phaedrus "the perplexities of twenty years are cleared away. Plato did not vacillate between praise and blame of rhetoric. He unfolded a theory as it developed in his mind."[16] What Plato ended up with, then, was a position which saw rhetoric as "an art akin to dialectic. Instead of merely castigating

rhetoric, he was now ready to harness it in the service of philosophy and truth."[17]

Finally, evidence that the Platonic view of a rhetorical τέχνη developed between the writing of the Gorgias and Phaedrus is present in Plato's Theaetetus. This work, whose date of composition is generally regarded as falling after the Gorgias but before the Phaedrus, is as vehemently opposed to rhetoric as the Gorgias.[18] But at one point in the dialogue, Plato begins to develop the possibility that "wise and honest public speakers substitute in the community sound for unsound views of what is right" (167c). This conception is rejected later in the dialogue, but it is just this kind of improved rhetorical τέχνη that Plato eventually accepts in the Phaedrus.

A reconsideration, then--perhaps of this very passage in the Theaetetus--accompanied by an improved dialectic (see below, p. 15.), led to the final formulation of Plato's rhetorical theory in the Phaedrus.[19] I will now explicate the tenets of that theory.

## THE TENETS OF PLATO'S RHETORICAL THEORY

If Black's view is accepted, the task of reconstructing Plato's theory of rhetoric becomes less difficult, for it enables one to bring together and juxtapose relevant passages of the dialogues into a coherent system. For the purposes of this essay, such an effort is important since

it will provide a framework for discussion of the epistemological relevance of Platonic rhetoric.

A close reading of the dialogues reveals three principal elements in Plato's rhetorical theory. First, it is clear from the Phaedrus that rhetoric, whether it be good rhetoric (such as Isocrates might express) or bad rhetoric (of the Gorgian variety), is not limited to the oration (see 257d-258e & 259e). As Reginald Hackforth has observed, it encompasses "any form of address; spoken or written, on any subject. . . ."[20] One corollary to this fact is that any form of discourse will have, for Plato, a rhetorical dimension. Another corollary suggests that the speeches Socrates actually delivered, as well as the written dialogues of Plato, must themselves be regarded by us--as they must have been by Plato himself--as rhetorical discourse, too. For it is hardly likely that Plato would describe rhetoric as "good and bad speaking and writing" (Phaedrus, 259e) without realizing the implications of his claim, such being the import of Black's observation that "Plato was both a subtle and disciplined thinker."[21] But more on this score below; at this point one may conclude that the scope of rhetoric potentially encompasses all discourse.

A second tenet of Plato's rhetorical theory views rhetoric as a τέχνη with its own proper subject matter, methods and principles. One will recall that among

Plato's most severe indictments of Gorgias was the charge that his rhetoric was more akin to cooking, a knack rather than an art; that is, it possessed no methods or principles of its own (465a). But the constructive side of Plato's rhetorical theory clearly holds the discipline to be an art. For example, in the Gorgias Socrates speaks of the "true art of rhetoric" as opposed to "the sort that merely flatters" (517a). Again in the Phaedrus, Plato demands that rhetoric be a τέχνη if we are to believe it is valuable in the search for truth (260e).[22] At another point, he employs the term ἐπιστήμη, that is, "scientific," to describe the true art of rhetoric (Phaedrus, 270e).

Third, it is apparent that rhetoric can only function to the degree it influences the soul. Plato explicitly posits three soul-related tasks which confront rhetoric as a τέχνη : 1) it must be employed with a thorough understanding of the soul (Phaedrus, 270b & 271a); 2) that understanding must include how and upon what the soul acts and how it may be acted upon (Phaedrus, 271a); 3) rhetoric must be so classified into types of discourse that the proper sort of rhetoric may influence its corresponding type of soul (Phaedrus, 271b). In sum, rhetoric, if it is to be labelled a τέχνη, must "sow words" in the soul of the auditor "founded on knowledge" (Phaedrus, 277a),

that is, knowledge previously acquired through the διαλεκτικός μεθοδος, the dialectical method.[23]

Combining the three principal ingredients which comprise the true art of rhetoric generates this definition: rhetoric is that art which sows concepts (words), founded upon knowledge, in the soul via the dialectical method. While one might object to the rather "rough and ready" nature of this formulation, let us regard it as preliminary. In the remainder of this essay I will explicate the definition within the context of the claim that "rhetoric is epistemic."

## ALTERNATIVE INTERPRETATIONS OF RHETORICAL KNOWING

The definition at which we have arrived--even at this embryonic stage--is virtually equivalent to the claim that "rhetoric is epistemic." It is clear, however, that this assertion entails an epistemology of rhetoric quite different from the one implicit in the conception of rhetorical knowing originally advanced by Scott. Hence, at this juncture, a closer examination of the claim that "rhetoric is epistemic" is required.

Surely, a number of things could be meant by the statement, "rhetoric is epistemic." First, one might be suggesting that rhetoric serves to energize the truth--to "make truth effective."[24] By this definition, the task assigned to rhetoric is one of simple communication; method

entirely supplants substance. As Scott correctly observes, though, this pronouncement "courts an attitude which has nearly always viewed rhetoric as the harlot of the arts."[25] Because it suggests that discourse transmits truths existing prior to the intervention of the rhetorical process, i.e., truths already cognitively held before the mind, I will label this position rhetorical objectivism.

A second possible meaning of rhetorical knowing is that which Scott himself adopts. Contending that "it is fundamentally an ethical dimension of one's thoughts and actions that rhetoric reveals,"[26] he characterizes the art as creating knowledge during and as the result of the process of communication. Rhetoric "aims at knowledge that is social and ethical."[27] Here emerges a rhetorical epistemology which is essentially relativistic in nature, arising out of the fact that within the context of social and ethical questions, "reality is socially constructed."[28] On Scott's view, individuals of any given society will, ideally, come to agree upon what is "real" through the intersubjective process of communication. In the words of Barry Brummett, another advocate of Scott's position, "reality is meaning, yet meaning is something created and discovered in communication."[29] Following Scott's own terminology in his most recent statement of the doctrine, I will call this view rhetorical relativism.[30]

While these two contrary theories of rhetorical epistemology, rhetorical objectivism and rhetorical relativism, have been the progenitors of the "rhetoric is epistemic" doctrine, there is at least one other interpretation of what that doctrine may entail. By this account, discourse neither serves as the wherewithal for communicating truths cognitively held before the mind, nor does it operate socially to construct reality. Rather, communication serves to search for truths or probabilities which have yet to be discovered. From this perspective, rhetorical knowledge is neither objective nor subjective--it is dialectical. As such, rhetoric is epistemic when it actively operates to assign meaning to the raw data, which assignment itself becomes newly discovered objects and relationships. Communication, in this sense, is the link between the precognitive, unnamed constituents of the world on the one hand, and the discovery of their existence and their possibilities in the cognitive life of the individual on the other. Here rhetoric's task is to differentiate, name, and interrelate the elements of experience.

In so functioning, rhetoric must consider the demands of all that exists beyond the rhetor's consciousness, insofar as this realm intrudes upon his/her cognitive or affective life. At the same time, since societies (and, of course, individuals) may be assumed to exercise their own demands, these must be considered too. Reality, if we are

to make any sense at all of the term, must, by the dialectical view, consist in a reconciliation of the world as it is and the world as we would have it.

Insofar as this position departs from those who maintain rhetorical relativism, its major implication is that what we take to be "truth" is just the reconciliation referred to. Of course, that is not to say we can always achieve such a reconciliation. I take it Walter Carleton had this in mind when, speaking of Scott's relativism, he wrote:

> His argument that men must often act on the basis of incomplete evidence or according to non-ultimate ethical principles implies only that uncertainty makes its way into significant areas of human endeavor, and not, as Scott would have it, that nothing is certain or that certain knowledge is unattainable.[31]

I will now contend that it is this third way of conceiving rhetorical knowledge, what I will label rhetorical dialectic, that Plato regarded as epistemic.[32]

## PLATO'S CONCEPTION OF RHETORICAL KNOWING

Earlier, I advanced a tentative formulation of Plato's definition of rhetoric. It maintained that the rhetorical τέχνη 'sows concepts (words), founded upon knowledge, in the soul via the dialectical method.' Clearly, the most

significant element of the definition is the demand that the true art of rhetoric operate from a detailed knowledge of the soul while it implants or "sows" words in the soul. Though a complete delineation of Plato's theory of the soul and its importance to the quest for truth is beyond the scope of this paper, there can be little doubt from even a cursory examination of the grosser tenets of his theory that epistemic rhetoric is suggested here.

Consider first the Platonic conception of reality. In the Phaedo, Plato divides reality into τὸ μὲν ὁρατὸν τὸ δὲ ἀιδές, that is, into the visible, material world and the invisible world of ideas, i.e., pure essences, the Platonic forms (Phaedo, 79a). As T. M. Robinson notes, these are "the objects of δόξα, opinion, and ἐπιστήμη, scientific or philosophical knowledge, respectively."[33] Significantly, Plato tells us that the soul is closer in resemblance to ἀιδή, "the invisible" (ideas), than to ὁρατά, the visible, "non-spiritual (objects)."[34]

The relationship between Platonic epistemology and the true art of rhetoric becomes clear when we realize that it is through the influencing or moving of the soul that knowledge is acquired. Gustav Mueller provides an excellent synopsis of just how the epistemology operates in his explanation of the myth of the soul in the Phaedrus (253ff.):

> The soul is like a chariot drawn by two winged horses and guided by a charioteer. . . . Life is a chariot race toward the gods in heaven [that is, toward the forms or essences]. Every soul desires to see them.
>
> . . .
>
> Those who succeed on their assent are guided by their yearning for the divine, the good, the wise and the beautiful. . . . [That is, by their desire for knowledge]
>
> . . .
>
> This ontological Absolute is mythically presented beyond the gods and their heaven as true Being itself, the absolute and eternal whole, truly evident to mind (nous) alone.
>
> . . .
>
> The vision of the idea is not a mystic or a direct intuition, but "recollection" at the occasion of experience. The vision of Ideas is occasioned by experience, but is not derived from experience.[35]

The suggestion that Plato ought to be given credit for the "rhetoric is epistemic" doctrine now becomes cogent in light of his explicit statement that "the function of oratory is in fact to influence men's souls" (Phaedrus, 271c). For, as we have seen, it is precisely this

activity of moving the soul which, in Plato's epistemology, is central to the quest for knowledge.[36]

There is also a second factor which suggests that Plato views rhetoric as a means of generating truth. In the Phaedrus the discussion of the διαλεκτικός μεθοδος represents the unveiling of the full-blown Platonic theory of dialectic. In Hackforth's words, "here we have Plato's first announcement of a new discovery to which he attaches the highest importance. We have, it is true, had a dialectical method sketched in an earlier dialogue, the Republic; but it was not the same as this, despite some points of resemblance."[37] It is my contention that for Plato to imbed the thesis that the art of rhetoric must employ the dialectical method to influence men's souls in the same dialogue in which he announces his refined philosophical methodology is supportive of the major claim of this essay. Moreover, it is no mere coincidence that the very introduction of dialectic is explicitly internalized within the body of two examples of oratory, viz., Socrates' two speeches on love,[38] with Plato taking great pains to point this out himself: "for they, I think, presented a certain feature [viz., the διαλεκτικός μεθοδος] which everyone desirous of examining oratory would do well to observe" (264e). Given these considerations, to make the claim that "rhetoric is epistemic" is to echo the voice of Plato from the fourth century B.C.

However, in passing, the reader must be cautioned against confusing Plato's dialectical epistemology with his idealist metaphysic. The question of what can be known or what the ultimate objects of knowledge may be is quite a separate issue from how one may come to know them. It is this distinction that advocates of rhetorical relativism have failed to make, probably in part because Plato himself often blurs the issue. Yet Aristotle, whose metaphysical realism was diametrically opposed to Platonic idealism, was able to develop a full-blown dialectic of his own and even teach it as an instructor in Plato's Academy, as well as write the Rhetoric, which viewed the art as "the counterpart of dialectic."[39]

## PLATO'S RHETORICAL PARADIGM

The basic character of Plato's view of rhetorical knowing has now been revealed. Yet, one important issue deserves further treatment. I refer to the question, What constitutes the purest form of rhetoric?

It will be recalled that in formulating the Platonic definition of rhetoric I urged that the scope of rhetoric be extended to cover written as well as spoken discourse. However, the reader-familiar with the Phaedrus may feel uncomfortable with such an unequivocal inclusion of literature, given what seems to be Socrates' indictment of the written word as inferior to spoken discourse:

> You know, Phaedrus, that's the strange thing about writing, which makes it truly analagous to painting. The painter's products stand before us as though they were alive: but if you question them, they maintain a most majestic silence. It is the same with written words: they seem to talk to you as though they were intelligent, but if you ask them anything about what they say, from a desire to be instructed, they go on telling you just the same thing for ever. And once a thing is put in writing, the composition, whatever it may be, drifts all over the place, getting into the hands not only of those who understand it, but equally of those who have no business with it; it doesn't know how to address the right people, and not address the wrong (275d-e).

Later in this section of the dialogue, Plato seems to be carrying on the attack when he makes Socrates speak approvingly of those who believe that "nothing that has ever been written whether in verse or prose merits much serious attention" (277e).

Considered apart from the context within which they appear--both that of the Phaedrus and that of the greater corpus of Platonic writings--these passages seem to rule out written discourse from the scope of rhetorical knowing.

But there is, in my judgment, ample evidence to indicate that such an exclusion is erroneous. For example, in the Phaedrus, intervening between the two passages just cited, is the following exchange between Socrates and Phaedrus:

> Soc. Then now that that has been settled, Phaedrus, we can proceed to the other point.
>
> Ph. What is that?
>
> Soc. The point that we wanted to look into before we arrived at our present conclusion. Our intention was to examine the reproach levelled against Lysias on the score of speech-writing, and therewith the general question of speech-writing and what does and does not make it an art. Now I think we have pretty well cleared up the question of art.
>
> Ph. Yes, we did think so, but please remind me how we did it.
>
> Soc. The conditions to be fulfilled are these: first, you must know the truth about the subject that you speak or write about: that is to say, you must be able to isolate it in definition, and having so defined it you must next understand how to divide it into kinds, until you reach the limit of division; secondly, you must have a corresponding discernment of the nature of the soul, discover the type of speech

> appropriate to each nature, and order and arrange your discourse accordingly, addressing a variegated soul in a variegated style that ranges over the whole gamut of tones, and a simple soul in a simple style (277a-c).

It is apparent that Plato is here drawing the same distinction between written discourse which is a τέχνη and written discourse which is not that he earlier applied to rhetoric. This interpretation of the text is supported by Hackforth who concludes: "The fundamental distinction for Plato is between those, whether speakers or writers, who rest on a basis of dialectic, who possess the truth about that on which they speak, and the ability to uphold it, and those who do not."[40]

The argument gains further credence from the generous comment by Socrates in the closing pages of the Phaedrus regarding Isocrates' literary endeavors: "it would not surprise me if with advancing years he made all his literary predecessors look like very small fry; that is, supposing him to persist in the actual type of writing in which he engages at present." Hence, Plato's indictment of written discourse at 275d-e and 277e of the Phaedrus, like his earlier indictments of rhetoric, must be viewed as referring to the written discourse in vogue, and should not be taken as an indictment of all written discourse. Of course, Plato's remarks here may have been intended ironically

(see below n. 7). But again, even if the passage is intended ironically, Plato's point is that the "actual type of writing" Isocrates ought to be engaging in is one patterned after the διαλεκτικός μεθοδος.

What I want to suggest now is the precise nature of the distinction between good writing and bad and it is just this: when Socrates indicts written discourse, he is only indicting those treatises which seek to teach a dogma, or in his words, a doctrine "containing important truth of permanent validity" (Phaedrus, 277d). On the other hand, written discourse which sows words in the soul that may grow and move the soul to a recognition of truth is, by the above analysis, to be regarded as "serious business," σπουδή. Given the previous discussion of discourse and its relation to the soul, the written word may now be regarded as in possession of a genuine rhetorical dimension, and a dimension which is epistemic, as all true rhetoric is. This interpretation is in keeping with Socrates' assessment of rhetoric as ψυχαγωγία τις διὰ λόγων, that is, "a kind of influencing of the mind by means of words" (Phaedrus, 261a).

One other important consideration further strengthens this conclusion. If the contention that Plato views written discourse as epistemologically significant is rejected, then one may as well relegate the thousands of pages Plato wrote

to the fireplace, for by his own analysis they are at best a παιδία, a "pastime."

What all this suggests, of course, is that both the written and spoken word, while each possessed of a rhetorical dimension, do not themselves impart truth. Rather each one may independently help the soul (mind) in its generation of truth.[41] Now, to return to the question of which of these types of discourse exhibit the purest form of rhetoric, it seems we are left unable to choose between the two. Could it be that both forms of communication are each, in and of themselves, instances of the "paradigm of epistemic rhetoric"? While this would relieve us of the burden of choosing between the two, it would clearly be an unacceptable approach in the eyes of Plato since we would find ourselves engulfed in the famous problem of the one and the many. In the very dialectical spirit we have been concerned with throughout this essay, Plato would ask, What is the one thing among the two types of rhetoric we have delineated which makes them both rhetoric?

The answer to this query must, in my judgment, involve the soul, since rhetoric's ability to move the soul has been shown to be the key to rhetoric as a τέχνη. If we carry the inquiry one step further and ask how--that is, through what operation--does rhetoric bring knowledge to fruition from words "veritably written in the soul of the listener" (Phaedrus, 278a), we may resolve the problem.

The solution I wish to posit, then, may be stated as follows: Genuine rhetoric moves the soul to reflection; the process of reflection is a function of intrapersonal discourse; and intrapersonal discourse is, for Plato, the rhetorical paradigm.

## KNOWLEDGE, REFLECTION, AND INTRAPERSONAL DISCOURSE

One of the few scholars who have paid much serious attention to intrapersonal rhetoric is Don Burks.[42] Burks recognizes the essentially intrapersonal nature of Plato's dialectical method and hints at its relation to the soul when he quotes R. G. Collingwood to the effect that dialectic is "the interplay of question and answer in the soul's dialogue with itself."[43] A bit later, speaking of self-persuasion, Burks speculates that: "The ancient Greeks may have been familiar with the concept of self-persuasion. The Greek word peitho which when in active voice is translated as persuade may when in the middle voice be translated by the English word obey. One wonders if the subtle mind of the Greek was not conveying the idea that selfhood is often involved in rhetorical experience, as when, after interior dialectic and perhaps a struggle with self, we at last arrive at a feeling of certainty."[44] Whether one accepts Burks' claim on the basis of such an analysis or not, this is as close as he comes to linking dialectic,

soul, and intrapersonal discourse to Plato's overall rhetorical theory.

That no one has come closer is surprising given the rather explicit connection which Plato himself makes, as, for example, in the Sophist. Here Plato, through the character of the Stranger, suggests to and agrees with Theaetetus, his interlocutor, that "thinking and discourse are the same thing, except that what we call thinking is, precisely, the inward dialogue carried on by the mind with itself without spoken sound" (263e; see also, 264a). Much the same concept of intrapersonal rhetoric is advanced, with characteristic Socratic irony, in the Theaetetus, where Socrates describes "the process of thinking" as: "a discourse that the mind carries on with itself about any subject it is considering. You must take this explanation as coming from an ignoramus, but I have a notion that, when the mind is thinking, it is simply talking to itself, asking questions and answering them, and saying yes and no" (190ff.).

That Plato would view such thought carried on through intrapersonal rhetoric as the purest form of discourse seems to go without saying given the discussion to this point. However, I would appeal to Socrates remarks in the Republic where he describes "excellence of thought" as one of the most "divine qualities" of the soul as textual evidence (518c-e). If one assents to Erwin Edman's

pronouncement that "the whole character of thought as Plato conceives it is a dialogue of a mind with itself,"[45] one cannot escape the implication that intrapersonal discourse is for Plato the paradigm of rhetorical knowing.[46]

## IMPLICATIONS

If I have succeeded in making plausible the suggestion that Plato regarded rhetoric as epistemic and that he viewed intrapersonal discourse as the purest form of such rhetoric, then we now have available to us a powerful tool to assist in interpreting a number of the more puzzling features of Plato's writings. For example, the question of why Plato so often ends his discourses without reaching a conclusion now becomes clear: such is not his intent as a philosopher or writer. Rather, Plato seeks to sow those concepts in the soul (mind) of the reader which will cause him to reflect and discover the truth which is within himself. Maurice Natanson comes the closest of any contemporary scholar to advancing a similar view: "knowledge is within the person, and teaching must be restricted to a process of dialectical occasioning."[47] Rhetorical knowing, then, becomes virtually identical to philosophical dialectic. Hence Brummett is correct when he describes rhetoric as "process," though far more than "intersubjectivity" is involved.[48] It is when the rhetorical process has been completed, when the final intrasubjective assent to one among many possible meanings

has been made, that we have arrived at a recognition of the existence of a new object or relationship in the world. We have come to see the world a bit differently and, if the discovery is not trivial, the dialectic will continue, i.e., the process will resume until we have either satisfied ourselves as to the nature of that discovery (new possibilities) or conclude that no more can be known about it.

It is precisely because of the dialectical nature of the quest for truth that only the baldest, most trivial knowledge can be imparted by written discourse, including the Platonic dialogues. Plato describes the "wits" of writers of treatises on "serious realities" as having been "utterly blasted" (Seventh Letter, 344d). Yet Plato himself wrote prolifically on philosophical matters. By employing the notion of rhetorical dialectic, the paradox is amenable to solution. The answer emerges upon considering Plato's criticism of writing, for example, in his Seventh Letter. There he details the reasons why "no serious man will ever think of writing about serious realities for the general public" (344c). In a word, it is because of the nature of coming to know. Plato illustrates with the example of moral knowledge:

> The study of virtue and vice must be accompanied by an inquiry into what is false and true of existence in general and must be carried on by constant practice throughout a long period, as

> I said in the beginning. Hardly after practicing detailed comparisons of names and definitions and visual and other sense perceptions, after scrutinizing them in benevolent disputation by the use of question and answer without jealousy, at last in a flash understanding of each blazes up, and the mind, as it exerts all its power to the limit of human capacity, is flooded with light (Seventh Letter, 344b).

Serious inquiry, then, is far too complex and involves a process far too dynamic to be completed within the pages of even the most meticulous and lengthy treatise. Yet, it is not difficult to see how a written work might be framed by its author to constitute a part of the dialectical process by which one comes to know. Functioning in this manner, written discourse may launch the dialectical process by engaging the soul via the διαλεκτικός μεθοδος.

This interpretation explains why we are uncertain as to the nature of justice after reading the Republic, perplexed as to what piety is upon completing the Euthyphro, and dissatisfied with the definitions of the essence of love when we put down the Symposium. If we regard each of these written works of Plato as propaedeutic, as the beginning of the dialectical process rather than the result, then our perplexity will be resolved.

Another direction which rhetorical scholars might take in pursuing the foregoing analysis is a reinterpretation of Plato's use of myth, metaphor, and irony. Near the beginning of the second speech of Socrates in the Phaedrus, Plato tells us that he is about to begin his proof on the nature of love (245c). But that proof soon begins to take the form of a myth when Socrates begins speaking of the charioteer and the two horses (246a). If we are to believe that there is rhetorical force in this writing of Plato it must be a function of the reflection or intrapersonal discourse such a myth occasions. As such, myth (and undoubtedly metaphor and irony, too) perform a dialectical, albeit intrasubjective, role.

Finally, the analysis herein offered of Plato's rhetorical theory may prompt those expositors of the new rhetoric who have become concerned with the epistemological properties of discourse to reassess the direction their movement has taken. Unwilling to embrace an idealist metaphysic, many of these theorists have recoiled, fearing that rhetoric will be regarded as the "harlot of the arts" if she does not perform some unique task such as creating Gorgian social realities. Hopefully, what has been said in this essay demonstrates that such an either/or position is misguided and that, even disregarding Platonic idealism altogether, the concept of rhetorical dialectic offers a unique way of explaining the generation of knowledge. By

viewing rhetorical knowing as dialectical, rather than as objective or subjective, we commit ourselves to no ontology, Platonic or otherwise. We merely come to realize, as Plato did in the fourth century B.C., that whatever may be known, may be discovered, in at least one important sense, rhetorically.

## END NOTES

[1] Douglas Ehninger, Contemporary Rhetoric: A Reader's Coursebook (Glenview, Ill.: Scott, Foresman and Co., 1972), p. 5.

[2] Robert L. Scott, "On Viewing Rhetoric as Epistemic," The Central States Speech Journal, 28 (1967), 9-17.

[3] Scott, p. 17.

[4] James W. Hikins, "The Epistemological Relevance of Intrapersonal Rhetoric," The Southern Speech Communication Journal, 42 (1977), 223.

[5] A recent attempt to remedy this deficiency is the as yet unpublished Ph.D. dissertation of Walter M. Carleton, "On Rhetoric as a 'Way of Knowing': An Inquiry into Epistemological Dimensions of a New Rhetoric," Pennsylvania State Univ., 1975. Carleton's dissertation focuses on the work of Richard McKeon and, while relevant to the epistemology of rhetoric, does not impinge directly upon the conclusions of this essay.

[6] An excellent analysis of not only this issue but the entire dialogue is in Reginald Hackforth, Plato's

Phaedrus: Translated with an Introduction and Commentary (London: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1972).

[7] It should be noted that Plato scholars disagree concerning the interpretation of this passage and other sections of the dialogue where Plato seems to praise Isocrates. The majority of scholars hold that the praise is sincere; see, for examples, the bibliography in V. Buchheit, Untersuchungen zur Theorie des Genos Epideiktikon (Munich 1960), 232. On the other hand, a few have suggested that Plato's remarks are, in fact, ingenuous; they are to be taken, so goes the argument, not literally but ironically. Representatives of this point of view include R. L. Howland, "The Attack on Isocrates in the Phaedrus," Classical Quarterly, 31 (1937), 151-59; G. J. deVries, "Isocrates' Reaction to the Phaedrus," Mnemosyne, 6 (1953), 39-45; Hans Raeder, "Platon und die Rhetoren," Filosofiske Meddelelser: Kong. Danske Videnskabernes Selskab, 2, No. 6 (1956), 10-17; V. Buchheit, op. cit., 90-108 passim, 232-33; James A. Coulter, "Phaedrus 279a: The Praise of Isocrates," Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies, 8 (1967), 225-36. The principal point to be made in connection with this controversy is that, regardless of the position one accepts, no violence is done to the contention that Plato held some form of rhetoric to be a genuine τέχνη. As much is suggested by even those who subscribe to the ironic

interpretation. Coulter, for example, writes: "Surely Plato's point is that Isocrates never did become dissatisfied and turn to more serious matters, such as a study of dialectic, on which a more profound rhetoric might be based (Coulter, op. cit., p. 227, n. 4, italics added by author). And Howland, after maintaining that "the whole dialogue must be considered as a direct and comprehensive attack on the educational system of Isocrates" (Howland, op. cit., p. 152, italics added by author), concludes that the latter part of the Phaedrus is "an outstanding example of Plato's thesis that knowledge of the subject and a strict regard for essential truth result in a fine discourse" (Howland, op. cit., p. 157, n. 1). Hence, those who consider Plato's remarks about Isocrates to be an exercise in Platonic or Socratic irony actually support the thesis that, in Plato's view, a rhetorical τέχνη is attainable.

[8] The rejection of any valid rhetoric is, in the Gorgias, almost complete. For example, Socrates does speak of the "true art of rhetoric" as opposed to "the sort that merely flatters" at 517a.

[9] Edwin Black, "Plato's View of Rhetoric," The Quarterly Journal of Speech, 44 (1958), 361-74.

[10] Black, p. 367.

[11] Richard Leo Enos, "The Epistemology of Gorgias' Rhetoric: A Re-Examination," The Southern Speech Communication Journal, 42 (1976), 35-51.

[12] Enos, p. 50.

[13] Black, p. 368.

[14] Black, p. 368.

[15] Rollin W. Quimby, "The Growth of Plato's Perception of Rhetoric," Philosophy & Rhetoric, 7 (1974), 71-79.

[16] Quimby, p. 78.

[17] Quimby, p. 78.

[18] The case for dating the Theaetetus between the Gorgias and the Phaedrus is advanced by H. von Arnim, Platos Jugenddialoge und die Entstehungszeit des Phaidros (1914) and by H. Raeder, Platons Philosophische Entwickelung (Leipzig 1905), pp. 245-79. See also the discussion by Hackforth, pp. 3-7.

[19] To the long list of scholars who contend that Plato held a rhetorical τέχνη possible, one may add the name of Michael Volpe. After a critical analysis of the Apology, Volpe concludes: "The Apology demonstrates that rhetoric, the exposition of one's beliefs in an uninterrupted discourse directed to other men, is [for Plato] an acceptable

form of philosophical inquiry." While Volpe's conclusion is supportive of the major thesis of this paper, I do not include his analysis in the text because I do not believe Plato was sympathetic to rhetoric of any kind when he wrote the Apology. Virtually all Plato scholars are agreed that the Apology was written very early in Plato's career and certainly before the Gorgias and the Phaedrus. The implication is that the Apology was composed before Plato conceived of a genuinely philosophical rhetoric. Space precludes an examination of Volpe's work in any detail, but Socrates' defense in the Apology can doubtlessly be viewed as other than an exercise in rhetorical exposition. See Michael Volpe, "Practical Platonic Rhetoric: A Study of the Argumentation of the Apology," The Southern Speech Communication Journal, 42 (1977), 137-50.

[20] Hackforth, p. 115.

[21] Black, p. 361.

[22] See also Hackforth, p. 11.

[23] For a discussion of the dialectical method as it appears in the Phaedrus see Hackforth, pp. 134-37.

[24] The notion that rhetoric's proper role is one of "making truth effective" is found in François Fenelon's Dialogues on Eloquence. In addition to its appearance

in numerous rhetorical works of the Modern period, rhetorical objectivism finds sympathetic treatment in the contemporary literature; see, for example, Richard Weaver, Language is Sermonic (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 1970), pp. 11, 12, 17, 19, 71.

[25] Scott, p. 9.

[26] Robert L. Scott, "On Viewing Rhetoric as Epistemic: Ten Years Later," The Central States Speech Journal, 27 (1976), 259.

[27] Scott, "Ten Years Later," p. 259.

[28] Scott, "Ten Years Later," p. 261. Scott acknowledges the identity of his position with that of Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, The Social Construction of Reality (Garden City, N. Y.: Doubleday and Co., 1966). However, one wonders if Scott has not gone considerably beyond the worldview intended by Berger and Luckmann who, as Laird Addis notes, are careful to separate "the questions of truth and causation." See Addis' The Logic of Society (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1975), esp. pp. 137-58.

[29] Barry Brummett, "Some Implications of 'Process' or 'Intersubjectivity': Postmodern Rhetoric," Philosophy and Rhetoric, 9 (1976), 30.

[30] Scott, "Ten Years Later," p. 263.

[31] Walter M. Carleton, "Theory Transformation in Communication: The Case of Henry Johnstone," The Quarterly Journal of Speech, 61 (1975), 78.

[32] A full treatment of the nature of rhetorical dialectic and what distinguishes it from rhetorical objectivism and rhetorical relativism is a task for a separate monograph. However, a few more words might be said here in an effort to avoid misinterpretation. I have suggested that rhetorical dialectic seeks to differentiate among, name, and interrelate the constituents of experience. On this view, the ontological status of such constituents need not be regarded as subsisting in or depending upon a transcendental world of forms and so demanding "objective" assessment. Neither, on the dialectical interpretation, is rhetorical knowledge wholly a function of the social construction of reality. For if the world is to be an "ordered" or "rational" reality in the eyes of individuals or societies (whatever one's definition of a "society" may be), the pre-cognitive constituents of experience, and the demands they make, cannot be ignored. Rhetorical dialectic is dialectical precisely because it mediates between the pre-cognitive (unknown but experienced) and cognitive (known) realm. It is a way of knowing because it is a way of bridging the gap

between unknown and known, generating knowledge as it does so.

[33] T. M. Robinson, Plato's Psychology (Toronto: The University of Toronto Press, 1970), p. 97.

[34] See Robinson, p. 97, n. 12.

[35] Gustav Emil Mueller, Philosophy as Dialectic (New York: Philosophical Library, Inc., 1965), pp. 227-28 (italics added by author).

[36] The part played by the soul in acquiring knowledge is an issue far too complex to receive adequate comment here. An excellent treatment of the soul and its relation to knowledge appears throughout Mueller, op. cit.

[37] Hackforth, p. 134.

[38] I refer here to the two speeches of Socrates at Phaedrus, 237b-241d and 243e-257b.

[39] Aristotle's insistence that rhetoric has no subject matter of its own (Rhetorica, $1355^{b}$ 35) was a considerable step forward in divorcing dialectical epistemology from Platonic idealism. But the step had been taken even earlier, especially in the Topics. There, as Friedrich Solmsen notes, "Aristotle by and large ignores the ontological status of the Forms." "The Topics has taken over

the scheme of the Platonic diaeresis, which had originally been devised for 'those positing Ideas'." Nonetheless, Aristotle finds himself under no obligation to rule on the question "whether the τὶ ἐστιν of the definitory question refers to an ontological essence or rather to something in the nature of a 'universal' that need not, and is perhaps better not supposed to, subsist." See "Dialectic Without the Forms," in Aristotle on Dialectic: The Topics: Proceedings of the Third Symposium Aristotelicum, ed. G. E. L. Owen (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1968), pp. 59, 61, 59 respectively.

[40] Hackforth, p. 167 (italics added by author).

[41] The mind was, for Plato, at least a major part of the soul (See Robinson, pp. xii, 13). I follow Hackforth in translating ψυχαγωγία τις διὰ λόγων as "a kind of influencing of the mind by means of words" (Phaedrus, 261a). We may take Plato to be using νοῦς and ψυχή synonymously for the purposes of this study, without denigrating the analysis.

[42] Don M. Burks, "Persuasion, Self-Persuasion, and Rhetorical Discourse," Philosophy and Rhetoric, 3 (1970), 111-19.

[43] Speculum Mentis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1924), p. 77. Cited by Richard McKeon in "Dialectic and

Political Thought and Action," Ethics: An International Journal of Social, Political, and Legal Philosophy, 65 (1954), 15.

[44] Burks, p. 113.

[45] Irwin Edman, The Works of Plato (New York: The Modern Library, 1956), p. xxvi.

[46] At this stage it may be objected that the "discourse" Plato refers to in the passages quoted (Sophist 263e and 264a, Theaetetus 190ff., Republic 518c-e), while they do refer to intrapersonal discourse and while they do indicate that such discourse is epistemic, they do not suggest rhetoric but rather dialectic. Though such an objection would be in keeping with the distinction rhetoricians have made in the post-Aristotelian history of rhetoric, it would also miss the whole point of the analysis, viz., all genuine rhetoric is, for Plato, dialectical. It is dialectical not in the sense of embodying formal syllogisms, for the development of formal logic had to await Aristotle, and even he kept clear the distinction between dialectic and formal argument. Rather, it is dialectical in the sense of διαλεκτικός originally employed by the Greeks through Plato, that is, "the pursuit of serious inquiry" (See Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, A Greek-English Lexicon, 9th ed. [Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1940],

s.v. "διαλεκτικός."). In fact, doubt may well be cast on the legitimacy of any distinction between rhetoric and the great majority of what is customarily labeled "dialectic." Though an adequate discussion of just why is beyond the scope of this study, the rationale is embodied in an essay by Henry W. Johnstone, Jr., "Rationality and Rhetoric in Philosophy," Quarterly Journal of Speech, 59 (1973), 381-89.

[47] Maurice Natanson, "The Claims of Immediacy," in Philosophy, Rhetoric, and Argumentation, ed. Maurice Natanson and Henry W. Johnstone, Jr. (University Park, Pa.: The Pennsylvania State Univ. Press, 1965), pp. 153-54.

[48] Brummett, pp. 39-42.